

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL GROWS UP?  
AN IDENTITY CRISIS**

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“The day is not far off when the Economic Problem will take a back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and head will be occupied, or reoccupied, by our real problems – the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.”<sup>(1)</sup>

It is perhaps ironic to begin a discussion of the Scottish Arts Council in its twentieth birthday year with such a quotation from the first Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, parent organisation to the SAC. In fact, both bodies are currently under siege over economic and other issues, a controversy which is intensified by the fact that the entire concept of state patronage for the arts is seriously being called into question for the first time since its inception in 1945.

Any crisis, whatever its extent, is useful insofar as it exposes the essence of the parties involved. The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) in its present dilemma emerges as a spongelike, amorphous entity, adroit in the employment of survival tactics. This fact is central to the assertion that the SAC, with its inherent contradictions, typifies other bodies attempting to administer the state, and therefore warrants examination for insight into questions facing Scottish society as a whole. In effect, the problematic existence of the SAC may be viewed as a microcosm of Scotland itself.

Discussion of these ideas begins with the current operation and predicament of the SAC. Then follows an analysis of its evolution in light of the underlying themes of money, power and questions pertinent to the role of the SAC and the arts in Scottish society. This process will, it is hoped, substantiate the premise that the SAC can serve as a mirror for Scotland and thereby stimulate further discussion of issues relevant to the future of both.

**Current Operation**

At present, the SAC is the Scottish arm of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), a QUANGO established by the government and charged with the responsibility for state subsidy of the arts. The stated aims of the Arts Council are:

- 1) to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice

- of the arts
- 2) to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain
  - 3) to advise and co-operate with government departments, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with these objects.<sup>(2)</sup>

The SAC negotiates with the ACGB each year for its apportionment of the ACGB parliamentary allocation. It then has complete autonomy in disbursement of these funds to grant-seeking artists and arts organisations in Scotland, although it has no administrative authority over them. The SAC is accountable financially to the government at the end of each fiscal year.

The council itself is comprised of 20 members, appointed by the ACGB, final approval resting with the Scottish Secretary of State. Nominations are open to the public, and once appointed, members may serve a maximum of two three-year terms. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman are members of the Arts Council of Great Britain, and with recommendations from the SAC Director and senior officers are influential in the selection of council members. An assessor from the Scottish Office Education Department attends all council meetings, although the SAC is directly answerable to the Minister of Arts and Libraries.

The SAC is advised by a Policy and Resources Committee (comprised of the SAC chair and committee chairs); by the various art-form committees responsible for the review of individual grant applications, and by specialist panels for the most time-consuming evaluations. Committee and panel members are appointed by the council. All members of the council, committees and panels serve on a volunteer basis.

The SAC also has a staff of 40 full-time and 6 part-time professionals which includes the Director, Deputy Director, and five departmental directors. The staff is responsible for the coordination and implementation of policy, serving as the administrative liaison point for the Council and its constituencies. In-depth review of grant proposals and on-site investigation is done by the staff in preparation for appropriate committees and panels.

### Current Predicament

It is difficult at first glance to determine the actual scope of the current dilemma. The evidence of unrest consists of isolated protests against the Arts Council, and may not seem to warrant the crisis label. It is legitimate to ask: at what point do these individual sparks constitute a raging inferno?

There is a crisis, but clarification of one key point is essential in order to realise this. It is the very fact that these portents are isolated which

explains the nature of the Arts Council's survival strategy. Such fires may be stamped out relatively easily, provided they do not become too numerous and out of control. This divide and rule tactic serves to eliminate the possibility of a coherent opposition (the raging inferno), and allows the Arts Council to exist not peacefully, but without threat of extinction. It must act to preserve itself, employing whatever defusing devices are necessary to maintain status quo.

In December 1986, the Scottish Arts Council announced its 1987-88 allocation: £14.12 million, a 4.4% increase over present year funding, representing 12% of the unearmarked ACGB grant, the SAC indicated that it had fared well in winning this 12% during a year when the total ACGB allocation had been increased by only 3.4% to £138.4 million. (Note that of the £138.4 million, £26.2 million were previously earmarked for the SAC.) Thus:

£138.4 million	(total ACGB)
<u>– 26.2 million</u>	(earmarked SAC)
£122.1 million	(un-earmarked ACGB)

Total 1987-88 SAC allocation is therefore:

£14.12 million	(12% of ACGB)
<u>+26.20 million</u>	(earmarked funds)
£40.32 million	

SAC Chairman, Professor Alan Peacock, did warn that "there may be a number of difficult and possibly unpleasant decisions to be taken"<sup>(3)</sup> regarding apportionment of these funds; but he upheld an essentially optimistic view of the arts future for Scotland.

By the end of January, distribution decisions were made, with 45% of allocated funds going to four major organisations: Scottish Opera (21.9%, up 2%), Scottish National Orchestra (9.8%, up 4.3%), Scottish Ballet (9.1%, up 5%), Scottish Chamber Orchestra (4.2%, up 5.7%). These groups face cost increases well upwards of 5% merely to maintain status quo.

The fires of protest began with a flurry of media activity subsequent to these announcements. Frank Dunlop, Edinburgh Festival Director, accused the SAC of a "complete lack of confidence in the Festival and horrifying disregard for its well-being."<sup>(4)</sup> *The Scotsman* Arts Editor, Allen Wright, proclaimed the "Scottish Opera Seeking Cash,"<sup>(5)</sup> referring to the SAC's "parsimony" and "punitive financial increase of only 2%."<sup>(6)</sup> An announcement that the Scottish Theatre Company is having to cancel its spring tour<sup>(7)</sup> resulted in SAC committee investigations and a subsequent article forecasting a "Bleak Future for Scots Drama."<sup>(8)</sup> Most recently, the

attacks have extended into the political arena, with SALVO, the Scottish arts lobby, calling for "a review of the SAC structure, functions and accountability."<sup>(9)</sup>

Events climaxed on 11 May with an announcement of publication by the right-wing Adam Smith Institute of a report which "proposes ending of subsidies to arts." Taking the position that any cultural activity should be left to find its place in society by persuading the public of its worth, the report condemns "noncommercial elitism that takes pride in its unprofitability." It proposes rapid phasing out in as little as three or four years – because the arts lobby "is nothing if not articulate and organisations would seek charitable status to exempt them from VAT, and businesses would receive extra tax relief for cultural investment."<sup>(10)</sup>

In the face of this adversity, the SAC has maintained a dual line of defence: first, that it has done well in procuring this level of funding, and second, that it is not responsible for arts funding decisions made by the government. Says Alan Peacock, "If the inadequacy of this amount stirs the blood and calls for action, then let that action be directed toward Ministers of the Crown and eventually Parliament... The most SAC can do is to see that it is fairly treated by the ACGB, and that the resultant sums are sensibly used."<sup>(11)</sup> a predictable diversion.

Clearly, the structure and operation of the SAC leave it vulnerable to the numerous and frequent criticisms levelled against it. Almost by definition, the integrity of its decision-making processes is suspect; personnel selection, grant allocation, policy determination are all subject to unsympathetic scrutiny.

### Evolution

The evolution of the SAC (and necessarily, the ACGB) is characterised by three themes which underlie all relevant issues, very simply: money, power, policy. A brief history of both institutions will provide a basis for discussion of these themes. It is interesting to note that its development, like the SAC itself, is rather ambiguous, without major surprises or pivotal issues.

During the Second World War, the government established an organisation under the auspices of the Minister of Education, known as the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. CEMA was responsible for the wartime provision of music, art and drama to the British populace, largely through direct provision of its own productions, but including subsidy of existing enterprises as well. Following the war, on 12 June 1945, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the replacement of CEMA with a permanent organisation, the Arts Council of Great Britain, which would receive its grant-in-aid directly from the Treasury. A royal

charter was granted on 9 August 1946 establishing the ACGB as an autonomous corporate entity with official status.

By 1 April 1947, the Scottish Committee of the ACGB was granted authority for independent administration of its funds. In general, a high degree of control over "associate" organisations and a large proportion of directly provided activities characterised this early period. The scope of activities widened steadily until the mid-1960's, with the trend away from directly provided activities. In February 1965, the government issued a white paper, for the first time seriously addressing the issue of state arts funding. Arts Council responsibility was re-shifted from the Treasury to the Department of Education and Science, with Under-Secretary Jenny Lee appointed to oversee the arts.

On 7 February 1967, a new charter redefined organisational objectives and established an independent Scottish Arts Council. Also during this year, Jenny Lee became Minister of State of the Department of Education and Science. By 1972, the SAC was producing its own annual reports and well-established in its "autonomy." Growth and general optimism continued through the 1970's despite inflation, and the expanding role of business in arts funding was signalled by the establishment of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA). With the imminent prospect of a devolved Scottish Assembly, the arts emerged as a more overtly political issue, evidenced in part by the appearance of the Scottish arts lobby, SALVO.

The 80's saw a change from rising to stable (and possibly declining) arts funding in real terms, a profound difference whose ramifications are even now not fully realised. A general pessimism beginning with the devolution failure in 1979 seems to have accompanied the Scottish (and British) arts to their present state of crisis.

### Money

Money, not surprisingly, is by far the dominating theme throughout the development of this, and any, government funding agency. Without exception, the annual reports of the ACGB, and later, those of the SAC, plead for proper financial recognition of the arts by the state. Apparently at no time, even during the periods of rapid growth in the 60's and 70's has there been enough to meet the needs of the developing arts. It is possible that the Arts Council must resign itself to the fact that this is, was, and ever shall be its fate. It is also possible that the Arts Council has cried wolf on one too many occasions, thereby lessening its own effectiveness in soliciting government funds. In the mid 1950's, the ACGB proclaimed "the living arts in peril of extinction,"<sup>(12)</sup> and similar warnings by both the ACGB and SAC have recurred in subsequent decades.

For the sake of perspective, a few figures may prove useful:

Fiscal Year	Total Government Expenditure	ACGB Allocation	SAC Allocation
1945-46	£5,967 million	£175,000	*** (13)
1987-88	£173.7 billion	£138.4 million	£14.12 million (14)

\*\*\* no separate budget figures for the SAC

Interestingly, government expenditure for "Arts and Libraries" for 1987-88 is listed at £.8 billion with the Arts Council's £138.4 million representing only 17% of the total. It is difficult to imagine where these "arts" funds are going if not to the Arts Council, a body established to manage state arts subsidy. Arts practitioners are understandably disillusioned with such encouraging and untraceable figures.

In a similar vein, the Scottish arts "achieved" a 28-fold increase in real terms from their 1948 to their 1985 appropriation, from £429,860 to £12,024,000. (See table following.) Note that actual percentages of government spending are much less attractive and tend to be avoided by politicians.

#### Growth in Scottish Arts Appropriation from the ACGB as Compared with Inflationary Adjustment of Original Grant

	Actual	Adjusted Original (15)
March 1948	36,000	36,000
March 1955	75,750	49,585
March 1965	202,789	67,245
March 1975	2,421,700	145,936
March 1985	12,024,000	429,860

Money is the governing force behind the other two recurrent themes of power and policy. It is the endless quarrelling over a) whether there should be money, b) who should distribute it, and c) who should get it, which gives rise to the questions of power and policy. It may seem too obvious to state that were there enough money to go around, no one would bother much about the rest. Such is not the case, and thus we are confronted by power and policy issues which affect the decision-making processes mentioned previously.

#### Power

Power is a multidimensional theme: the relationship between the government and the ACGB, the ACGB and the SAC, and the SAC and its various constituencies, not to mention the internal power dynamic of these institutions. "The method in this country... is to recognise a chain of

responsibility all along the line, from Parliament to the Little Nessing Music Club. Parliament votes a block of money to the Arts Council to distribute at its discretion, in turn the Arts Council does not interfere with policies of bodies it assists: respect for self-government in the arts."<sup>(16)</sup> This is an interesting, quasi-military structure which absolves those at each level, regardless of their degree of influence, of any responsibility for decisions made by those farther up the pyramid.

To illustrate: periodically, the Arts Council has called for funding of grants on a triennial basis, to assist recipients with long-term planning. In 1962, the ACGB enthusiastically announced that the Treasury finally agreed to advance fixing of grants: "the most important financial innovation of the fiscal year."<sup>(17)</sup> However in 1965, when inflation rendered an additional funding request necessary, the ACGB noted with regret that "it has always seemed obvious to the Arts Council that the rigid determination of grants three years ahead in our line of business must be based on guesswork."<sup>(18)</sup>

The successful operation of this system depends upon the complacency of those at each level. When there is resistance or pressure of any kind from below and a reverse flow occurs, normally the divide and rule principle serves to defuse the tension. It is the nature of such a hierarchy, divided and subdivided, which allows such conflict to be absorbed into the system. Petty squabbling becomes the norm, but poses no serious threat to the perpetuation of the whole.

Primarily important in this discussion of the power theme is the relationship between the ACGB and the SAC. While the official landmarks in the emergence of the present-day Scottish Arts Council have been duly noted, additional evidence is necessary to portray accurately the complex nature of this relationship.

In the earliest days of the Arts Council of Great Britain, no separate budget figures existed for Scotland, which was regarded as one of the 'regions'. With the establishment in 1947 of the Scottish Committee and its autonomy in fund disbursement, more information became available. Total complacency in the acceptance of its allocation, and a provincial approach to both its problems and its reporting characterised the Scottish Committee at this time. Complacency remained while professionalism replaced provincialism during the relatively modest growth and expansion of the 1950's.

The 60's brought a developing confidence, and by 1966, on the eve of its SAC metamorphosis, the Scottish Committee was able to say: "The State's entry into the field of artistic subsidy is only 27 years old and already willy-nilly the Arts Council is bearing the financial responsibility for life and death over most of the professional organisations in Scotland. It is a

responsibility which has not been sought but which the pressure of rising costs and social change has imposed upon it.”<sup>(19)</sup> And one year later, as the Scottish Arts Council, “Scotland has often looked backward to a dimly remembered golden age... The present report perhaps suggests that this is no longer necessary.”<sup>(20)</sup>

Then followed a period of rapid expansion in Scottish arts funding to the present levels of 11-12%, and consequently, of Scottish artistic enterprise. A corresponding rise was evident in the SAC’s self-confidence. Faced with the ACGB endorsed prospect of the establishment of a National Touring Board, the SAC responded: “In all these discussions the SAC has taken the view that the degree of autonomy which it has always enjoyed, and which it believes to have been valuable in the management of the arts in Scotland, would seem to be threatened by any proposal for a supranational Board to control touring on a United Kingdom basis. It feels that it must remain ‘master in its own house...’ ”<sup>(21)</sup>

The eagerness and apprehension with which Scotland looked forward to the prospect of a devolved Scottish Assembly was certainly felt by the SAC. Involved discussions of the implications of devolution constitute the SAC reports during the mid-late 1970’s. Apparently it felt the need to justify its own existence, advocating the “arms’ length principle” which is the basis of the QUANGO concept. “The advantage of this arrangement is that it enables the Minister of the day responsible for the arts to consider public support of the arts on a long-term basis, and to represent these needs to Parliament on a longer perspective, leaving responsibility for individual day-to-day support decisions and priorities to the Arts Council.”<sup>(22)</sup> It is amazing to note that subsequent reports make absolutely no reference to the failure of the devolution referendum.

The SAC and the ACGB are in many respects involved in a parent/child relationship. The SAC was created by the ACGB and granted a sufficient degree of independence to develop its own identity. It remains, however, answerable to and financially dependent upon the ACGB. It has, in addition, the adolescent luxury of being able to present itself to its peers in an alternately dependent or independent relationship with its parent. It can take refuge in ACGB authority when faced with peer pressure or criticism, or distance itself from the parent and claim credit for actions met with approval. Further, the parent can speak for the child, with or without the child’s consent: states the ACGB in 1960, “... the Scottish Committee accepts two primary responsibilities, one of the Scottish National Orchestra and the other for the Edinburgh Festival.”<sup>(23)</sup>

In this context, it is easy to understand how the ambiguous use of the term Arts Council has evolved. Both parent and child have the same surname; references to common philosophies and practices may be attributed to the family name, while specific attitudes and actions belong to

the individuals. Problems of semantics arise when family members refer to themselves by their family name. In any given instance it is important to ask whether the SAC is speaking for itself (child), the ACGB as a separate organisation (parent), or the Arts Council collective: ACGB, SAC and Welsh Arts Council (family). Such confusion (planned innocuousness) can be used very conveniently as a cloaking device, another method of defusing potential conflict. We are justified in wondering: what is meant by “Arts Council?”

An attempt to determine who controls the money and the best way to get it inevitably leads those on the receiving end to attack the power distribution (or lack thereof). The fact that the entire structure is built on appointments, no matter how apolitical, merely adds fuel to the critical fire. Both the ACGB and the SAC have repeatedly found it necessary to defend themselves against accusations that they are “undemocratic” in structure and in operation. “The efficiency of the system depends on the predominantly sensible contribution of all concerned, rather than on any particular combination of checks and balances.”<sup>(24)</sup> This seemingly naive, blind faith approach gives the Arts Council great flexibility in assuming and shedding responsibility as it “tries to escape formality in its dealings.”<sup>(25)</sup> “It can initiate change as well as reflect it, it can lead as well as respond.”<sup>(26)</sup>

It is not surprising then that appointments to both the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Scottish Arts Council are closely scrutinised. Arts practitioners refer to the “curious presence” of people on committees, while council members insist that there is an optimum ratio of stability and fresh blood maintained through membership rotation.

Generally speaking, a glance through these lists does reveal an extraordinary number of recurring names: staff members who were once council or committee members and vice versa, council members who retire to become committee members, council members who retire and reappear in later years. While it may be true that the Arts Council is relatively free from political bias and that Lord Goodman, while he was ACGB Chairman “never heard a political discussion at any Arts Council meeting”<sup>(27)</sup> (whether or not this is a desirable goal is another issue entirely), the assertion that this is a fairly insular system does seem justified.

It follows then that it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the internal power dynamic of the SAC (or the ACGB). Outsiders attribute ultimate authority to staff members, claiming that they have too much influence over the volunteer element. In general, council and committee members believe that they have sufficient freedom in their decision-making duties. Indications from the annual reports are that a gradual shifting of responsibility to staff did take place over the years, and was in fact intentional. In 1975, ACGB Chairman Lord Gibson was “no longer convinced of the effectiveness of volunteerism”<sup>(28)</sup> and wanted the staff to

assume more evaluation responsibilities. Internal restructuring during the late 1970's shifted details of finance to senior officers, leaving committees freer to attend to policy.

## Policy

Where the power and policy themes overlap is in the area of Arts Council control of British arts development. Needless to say, funded organisations believe that they are at the mercy of seemingly whimsical changes in policy; noncompliance means no money and therefore is not an option. It seems safe to assume, further, that those who are denied funds do not look kindly upon the Arts Council's censorious powers.

As for the council itself, from its earliest days it has expressed intentions not to interfere too much. "This is a very important experiment – State support for the Arts without State control. We prefer not to control, though sometimes we must; we want to support, encourage and advise."<sup>(29)</sup> This at a time when the council acted virtually as a manager for recipient organisations, entering into complicated and restrictive legal contracts with them.

By 1962: "Our responsibility for effective leadership at the grand strategy level thus has to be discharged piecemeal, at the tactical and operational level, entirely by seconding the activities of others."<sup>(30)</sup>

By 1971: "It is quite clear that a change is taking place which must involve the Council more in the affairs of its client companies. The Council has always held firmly to the view that it should not interfere in matters of artistic policy; but artistic policy and finance, and even survival, are becoming more and more closely linked and the Council is finding it more difficult to stand apart."<sup>(31)</sup>

The point is clear that for any funding agency to deny its influence over grant recipients and the consuming public is naive. Discretionary fund disbursement means having the power to dispense money at will. The manner in which the Arts Council money is spent inevitably has a direct bearing on practitioners and partakers alike, and in addition affects the cumulative artistic legacy of the society. Current council members hasten to point out the fact that the Arts Council hasn't the absolute live or die authority of a Minister of Arts. Arts initiatives are not determined by the Council; the Council merely decides whether and how much it will fund them. Further, it cannot determine the fate of under- or non-funded bodies; they are free at least in principle, to develop outside the auspices of the Arts Council.

The Arts Council policies which affect all of this may be viewed simplistically as a quality vs. quantity dilemma. When the Arts Council is

emphasising quality it tends to channel its funds to a limited number of highly visible institutions; quantity means lesser amounts to a larger number of recipients. Not surprisingly, in the first instance the Arts Council is criticised for elitism, and in the second for trying to be all things to all people. The fact that it has swung back and forth innumerable times over the years leaves it vulnerable to attack for being indecisive: a no-win situation on all counts. It is quite telling that a 1985 self-conducted survey by arts administrators resulted in a vote of no confidence in the Arts Council.<sup>(32)</sup>

On behalf of "quality" in 1962: "The essence of the Arts Council policy nowadays is to sustain the best possible standard of performance at a limited number of institutions..."<sup>(33)</sup>

Four years later, in its own defence: "The Arts Council has been criticised in the past for apparent snobbism. Shortage of finance has limited support to the top end of culture. The best, the highest and the finest at least one must support, and it has been necessary to deny support to worthy, but less worthy causes."<sup>(34)</sup>

And again, in 1976: "There is a new creed emerging, to which we are totally opposed. This is the belief that because standards have been set by the traditional arts and because those arts are little enjoyed by the broad mass of people, the concept of quality is irrelevant.... Inevitably and rightly, most of our money has gone to the traditional arts."<sup>(35)</sup>

For an institution attempting to dispel the notion that it is elitist, the Arts Council has managed some awkward postures over the years. "The public, it seems, is not unwilling to pay a little more for the best. But second-best establishments cannot persuade their customers to pay more, especially as they have to compete with such other forms of entertainment as television and cinema"<sup>(36)</sup> – a rather back-handed method of championing the underdog. Indeed, the Arts Council has looked with great disfavour upon the television and film industries, while admitting that "despite the inanities which both these media abundantly disseminate, they have unquestionably enlarged the public appreciation of music and drama."<sup>(37)</sup> Without a doubt, "the distinction must be drawn between art and entertainment."<sup>(38)</sup>

The Arts Council's emphasis on quantity has taken various forms: first, in increased funding of smaller organisations; second, in the funding of new initiatives; and third in the funding of large institutions with the understanding that outreach programmes will be developed. Also, during times of 'quantity' emphasis, pressure is increased by the Arts Council on the local authorities to share responsibility of 'bringing art to the people.' Outreach falls basically into two categories – touring and audience development with young people being an especially favoured target: "if now battle is joined for the allegiance of young people between the

attraction of facile, slack and ultimately debasing forms of sub-artistic, under-civilised entertainment, and the contrary attraction of disciplined appreciation and hard, rewarding work, then we need to know and to enlist all the allies we can get.”<sup>(39)</sup> (Dare we mention the word elitism?)

The “potential conflict” of its twin obligations: 1) to improve standards of execution, and 2) to increase accessibility of the arts to the public<sup>(40)</sup> (essentially quality vs. quantity), was finally recognised by the Arts Council in 1964. It was afforded the luxury of continuing to shift its emphasis until the late 1970’s when it found itself “faced with a difficult choice: whether to try to sustain all existing clients at existing levels of activity and thereby to say ‘no’ to all new initiatives and so stultify enterprise, or to finance a few new activities, knowing that this can be done only at the expense of some existing activity.”<sup>(41)</sup> Indeed, and this was a forecasting of the pessimism of the 80’s: “the implication is clear that no body has the automatic right to subsidy forever, no body can any longer expect always to expand. Any new proposal will need to withstand the closest scrutiny.”<sup>(42)</sup>

Current council members, however, acknowledge the existence of “sacred cows” in the funding decisions, as well as the importance of supporting new initiatives. Thus it tends to be those “steadies” in the middle who are reduced or cut to accommodate the others.

What constitutes the immediate crisis, then, is the fact that there simply is not money enough to meet anyone’s need. The Arts Council is well beyond the dilemma of deciding whether to emphasize quality over quantity or vice versa. All recipients are in danger, and the Arts Council can no longer rely on the effectiveness of the divide and conquer principle. Mobilisation of a coherent opposition is a very real prospect indeed. Furthermore, pressure from above is being forcefully exerted in the form of government policy toward the arts. The position that the arts should be supported in the marketplace spells ultimate death for the Council, to say nothing of the effect upon the arts organisations themselves. It appears that the system, not designed to withstand such internal pressures and counterpressures, will have to change radically or self-destruct. The Arts Council, being caught in the middle, is not in an enviable position.

### The Questions

What then, does all of this tell us about Scotland, if in fact the SAC does serve as a mirror for the Scottish experience? A satisfactory solution to any problem requires asking the “right” questions – questions which are unrestricted by parameters established by the status quo. Implicit in the very name of the organisation are three exploratory questions, a discussion of which will elucidate the Arts Council’s present identity crisis as well as impart a possible means for resolution. Parallels to Scotland’s own dilemma should become clear simultaneously. The questions prompted by the

“Scottish Arts Council” are, in reverse order:

- 1) Should arts subsidy exist?
- 2) What is art in the context of this organisation and its role?
- 3) Does Scottish culture exist?

### Should Arts Subsidy Exist?

Where the SAC is concerned, the first question is the most basic. A negative response destroys the institution, while an affirmative response invites further interrogation. State subsidy of the arts began as an experiment, somehow never undergoing a conscious and thorough evaluative process; and it gradually became the more or less accepted status quo. The Arts Council itself articulated this non-committal attitude in 1949, “it is a mistake to think that the arts must necessarily be subsidised.”<sup>(43)</sup> Viewed by some as an essential practice by a responsible and enlightened society, by others as frivolous spending by an imprudent government and by most as a sort of necessary evil (“We don’t like it, but we don’t know what else to do about it.”), arts subsidy has survived and periodically flourished up to the present.

Scotland has been accused of having a “public client mentality” with the typical response to any societal problem being that someone should give money. This passionate passivity, at least in part, seems to be the philosophy behind arts subsidy as it has developed here. The fact that viable alternatives have not been explored judiciously, and that extreme dependence of the arts organisations on the council has been allowed to develop “willy nilly”, provided a sound basis for the present state of crisis. Subsidy through a government agency may in the end be a desirable goal, but it must be determined as such by an enlightened consensus. Only then can the system function effectively and without paranoia. As previously explained, it is inherently impossible under the present structure for the SAC to undertake such a limitless and necessary self-review, for it must act always in its own preservationist interests. Such action must therefore be initiated outwith the system.

### What is Art?

Consistent avoidance of the second and controversial question on the part of the SAC has given rise to the general confusion and numerous criticisms regarding policy discussed earlier. In an attempt to placate the situation, the SAC has adopted a sort of add-on philosophy, accommodating demands and vested interests as the need (and pressure) arises. This reactionary approach to institutional growth and planning is very much in character with the SAC’s survivalist strategy.

It is counter-productive for the SAC to deny that its conscious selection of fund recipients is a process which defines art – not certainly in an ultimate sense, but within this context. It must acknowledge and accept this not insignificant responsibility, before it is free to explore its role in the development of the arts in Scotland. It must determine which constituencies it is to serve and how best to serve them. It will then have established an identity for which it will have no need to apologise.

### Does Scottish Culture Exist?

If viewed strictly in politico-economic terms the third question must be answered in the affirmative, for Scotland consistently receives a greater per capita allocation for arts funding than other areas of Great Britain. However, a non-numerical approach immediately confronts the inherent contradictions mentioned earlier.

First encountered is the British/Scottish dilemma. Can there be a distinctly Scottish culture when the primary source of funds for the vast majority of the arts organisations says, of itself, “The SAC is not a Council for Scottish Arts but an Arts Council for Scotland?”<sup>(44)</sup> Given the discussion thus far, the fact that the SAC fails to address its Scottish identity is perhaps not incredible, but certainly illuminating. As a British government agency in Scotland, the SAC becomes a confrontation point between these two societal divisions. Is it possible for one organisation to function simultaneously as the cultural epicentre of Scotland and as the ambassador to Scotland of the ACGB? Must it ignore one role in order to fulfill the other? Or make token gestures toward the fulfillment of one, while emphasizing the other? To date these seem to have been the SAC’s chosen methods for coping with this dilemma.

If (when) the SAC denies its Scottishness, it can more easily fulfil its role as government messenger. This is a direct manifestation of the “branch plant” syndrome which has permeated the Scottish economic and political communities over the past several decades. In this role the SAC exists simply to funnel money, power, policy (themes earlier discussed), a one-way channel from the government to its Scottish constituency. As we have seen, a reverse flow in this system is problematic. It is when this occurs that the SAC is confronted by its Scottish responsibility and resorts to one or another of various placating gestures – e.g. special allocations to Gaelic initiatives, opposing stances to unpopular ACGB policies. These compromise moves on the part of the SAC neatly avoid a full-scale confrontation of the duality of its nature.

The British/Scottish dilemma of the SAC is but a smaller scale version of that which besets Scotland. Indeed, Scotland itself may in many respects be said to be a branch plant of Britain, administering on a more local level for a larger political, economic and cultural machine. Is it then possible for

Scotland to fulfil its role as a participant in the British state and yet protect its own interests at the same time? And more to the immediate point, what are the Scottish interests and do they warrant ‘protection’? It is not within the scope of this discussion to explore the former question in detail, but the latter question effectively returns us to our original: Does Scottish culture exist? Here “culture” implies a broader context than that served by the Scottish Arts Council; however, the underlying issue is constant: establishment of Scotland’s (cultural) identity through clarification, not necessarily elimination, of its contradictory roles.

It is also important, in probing the concept of Scottish culture on behalf of the SAC, to note the dominance of external influence in the Scottish arts. Significant numbers of administrators, creators and performers – influential and otherwise – are from England and other countries. Moreover, a great proportion of Scotland’s artistic talent has migrated southward and abroad for many years. This replacement, albeit unintentional, of indigenous talent with the foreign element extends to virtually every realm – political, economic and cultural – of the Scottish experience. Thus, the SAC shares with Scotland in general the burden of, and consequently the need to address, this additional inherent contradiction. Is there a distinction between the Scottish and the foreign; can the two be reconciled?

An extreme and negative syndrome stemming from this particular internal conflict is the “Scottish Cringe”, a general lack of confidence on the part of individuals, institutions and Scotland as a whole, based upon the notion that “if it’s English – or foreign – it must be better”. This crippling outlook automatically precludes the existence and value of a Scottish culture and is a vivid manifestation of the identity crisis (of the SAC and of Scotland) under discussion.

Also important in this exploration is the issue of media influence. Ironically, the media have had an inhibiting effect on Scottish culture, or at least on how Scottish culture is presented and perceived. Images of Tartanry and Kailyard have been swept up by the tourist industry, promoting the backward stereotypes of romanticism and provincialism. These narrow definitions of what constitutes Scottishness have become so entrenched both internally and externally as to hinder Scotland from recognising and promoting other forms of cultural activity. To uphold the standard media images as evidence of a Scottish culture is as extreme a perspective on the one hand as the Scottish Cringe is a denial on the other. The question of whether such a culture exists, and if so how best to nourish it, deserves more than a simply defined yes or no.

Perhaps a more enlightened perspective can be gleaned from the historians and writers. Tom Nairn affirms repeatedly that Scottish culture is not whole, a view echoed by Hugh MacDiarmid in his references to the



Caledonian split personality.<sup>(45)</sup> This concept of internal conflict (the basis for any identity crisis) is further substantiated by T C Smount's reference to Scotland's "remarkably strong native culture."<sup>(46)</sup>

Smout does a thorough job of portraying the pre-1707 Scotland as a nation fraught with turmoil. Ethnic, economic, geographic, class and religious struggles prevented real internal unity for many centuries. Despite all of this, and even after the union of the Parliaments under the British Crown (1707), Scotland was able to preserve its own cultural identity, in part through the strength of some key institutions: legal, educational and religious. The continuation of this sense of separateness in Scotland gave birth to the now fully developed British/Scottish dilemma. Thus from the beginning, Scottish culture existed in a state of increasing and seemingly permanent internal conflict. The inevitable complexities imposed upon this general confusion by the industrial age have brought Scottish culture to its present debilitated state of affairs.

The third question then is the link between the Scottish Arts Council's identity crisis and that of Scotland. Constructively critical self-examination on the part of both, through questions unhindered by present convention, is the only process which will permit resolution. Quarrels over policy change and staff interference are not the problems of the SAC. These are merely symptoms which serve to divert attention from the real issues of long unanswered questions; they belie a system which expends energy on the irrelevant at the expense of the relevant solely in order to sustain itself. So too with Scotland. In diverting attention to treatment of symptoms (be they council housing or North Sea oil), Scotland has historically avoided confrontation with the underlying conflicts causing its political, economic and cultural problems. As a result, it now finds itself caving in beneath a centuries-old accumulation of unresolved internal and external pressures.

Is there a Scottish culture? Only by stepping entirely outside the bounds of convention and conceiving and accepting the possibility that it may cease to exist in its present form, will the Scottish Arts Council – and Scotland – find a solution to this problem.

The author spent 1986-7 in the Department of Sociology at Edinburgh University examining the arts in Scotland. The chapter takes no account of events subsequent to this date.

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